

Eritrea's Participation At the High-Level Political Forum On Sustainable Development



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Part I

During the first weeks of this month, an Eritrean delegation led by Ambassador Sophia Tesfamariam took part in the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), convening under the theme, “Building Back Better from the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) While Advancing the Full Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. Gathering in New York under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (which is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations), the HLPF saw a total of 44 countries present their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: 11 countries (including Eritrea) presented for the first time, 28 for the second, three for the third, and two countries presented for the fourth time (Togo and Uruguay). Further breaking down the participating countries by region, 21 were

from the Africa region, nine were from Europe, seven were from Latin America and the Caribbean, and seven were from Asia and the Pacific.

What are VNRs?

The HLPF on Sustainable Development, first established in 2012 as an outcome of the Rio 20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, represents the main global platform to review and chart progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda.

In late September 2015, Eritrea, alongside all other 192 Member States of the United Nations, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations General Assembly. This global initiative is a powerful call to action for all countries – large and small, developed and developing – to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people are able to enjoy peace, equality, and prosperity. At the heart of the 2030 Agenda are the SDGs, a diverse collection of 17 comprehensive, closely interconnected goals, further broken down into 169 targets, to be achieved by the year 2030.

As a cornerstone of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages all Member States to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven,” and also “take into account national realities,” recognizing that “country ownership” is central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda stipulates that these regular reviews are to be voluntary, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and involve the active participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders. Other important recommendations are that it is to embrace all dimensions of sustainable development and look at the means of implementation, as well as be evidence-based, built on sound data sources, and pursue a multi-track approach.

The core of the VNR process involves countries assessing and presenting their progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs. VNRs provide an important snapshot of where countries stand in the implementation of

the SDGs, with a view to help accelerate progress through experience sharing, peer-learning, identifying gaps and good practices, and mobilizing partnerships.

Taking stock after the conclusion of the recent July 2022 session, the HLPF has now heard a total of 292 VNR presentations from 187 different countries since the reporting process first began back in 2016. (Countries that have not yet conducted and presented a VNR since the process began in 2016 include Haiti, Myanmar, South Sudan, the United States, and Yemen.)

Once countries have formally submitted and presented their VNR, their reports are published in a global VNR database where they remain freely accessible to the general public.

What makes VNRs particularly meaningful or important?

VNRs are much more than a basic report or simple end goal. In addition to assessing and tracking progress on implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs, VNRs are important for a wide range of reasons. For instance, the in-depth review and preparation procedures that are an integral part of VNRs require a coordinated effort and for many countries, the institutional arrangements made have proved useful for SDG implementation. The VNR process can also strengthen local or national ownership of the SDGs, while work conducted by international organizations has found that the VNR process can be an “important engine” for countries to accelerate SDG progress (especially if strong follow-up processes are in place).

In addition, the VNR preparation process encourages the meaningful engagement of an array of stakeholders, while as a tool for accountability at both the national and global levels, the VNR process promotes openness and transparency. Importantly, the VNR exercise creates channels for sharing knowledge, best practices, and common challenges. What is more, reporting mechanism, characterized by its frequency and comprehensive, detailed format, leads to an accumulation or substantial body of important lessons that can encourage other countries to follow suit or set standards for the international community.

Finally, the process can be an effective mechanism for identifying gaps and communicating the areas in which countries require more work or support for implementation, adjusting national development policies and activities, and mobilizing multi-stakeholder support and partnerships.

Brief background on preparation process for Eritrea's inaugural VNR

Eritrea's completion of a VNR and its participation in the HLPF process are a powerful testament to the country's enduring commitment to achieve its multifaceted development goals and tangibly improve the lives and general wellbeing of all of its people.

The country's inaugural VNR process formally commenced with an expression of interest communicated to the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2021. A central factor underlying Eritrea's decision was the genuine desire to remain actively engaged and contribute within the framework of mutual exchange and learning. Furthermore, through participating it sought to strengthen and consolidate national and local ownership of the 2030 Agenda, promote awareness, build a strong platform for future improvements, and accelerate its overall development progress.

The national review process and development of the VNR report were locally-owned, highly collaborative, open, and transparent, in addition to being participatory and all-inclusive. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Finance and National Development (MFND), a multi-institutional National SDGs Taskforce (NST) was established to provide direction and oversight for all processes leading to the VNR report. Led by the National Statistics Office (NSO), the NST was composed of high-level focal points from the MFND, Ministry of Health (MoH), and Ministry of Land, Water, and Environment (MLWE), along with representatives from the Office of the United Nations System (UNS) in Eritrea.

The NST prepared and approved a comprehensive concept note, a detailed roadmap and working plan, the terms of reference and outlines of the report, and all other technical engagements related to the entire review process. In line with the decision to prioritize reporting progress on SDGs 3 and 13, it also

commissioned two thematic working groups, headed by senior experts from the MoH and the MLWE, and comprising members from 23 stakeholders, including ministries, departments, local authorities, and civil society organizations, to comprehensively review and report national progress on goals and targets. Throughout the duration of the review process, the UNS in Eritrea remained highly engaged and it extended technical, logistical, and financial support.

In-depth consultations were convened at regular intervals, and they included the substantive involvement and critical contributions of a broad spectrum of stakeholders at the national and sub-national levels. Participants included local authorities, representatives from different ministries and national unions (including those representing youth, students, women, and workers), and officials from various agencies of the UNS in Eritrea.

Throughout the duration of the preparation and review process, the NST and its concomitant thematic working groups closely adhered to the practical recommendations and guidelines outlined in the “Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews” developed by the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Additionally, members of the NST and working groups benefited from several formal preparatory activities, including a series of multi-day regional and global workshops. These were complemented by a local sensitization and training seminar organized and delivered by the MFND and the United Nations Development Programme in Eritrea to members of the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students.

Part II

The core of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process involves countries assessing and presenting their progress, achievements, and challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). VNRs provide an important snapshot of where countries stand in the implementation of the SDGs, with a view to help accelerate progress through experience sharing, peer-learning, identifying gaps and good practices, and mobilizing partnerships.

To a large degree, the structure and elements of Eritrea's inaugural VNR report are consistent with those proposed under the United Nations Secretary-General's Guidelines. The report comprises a total of 64 pages, separated into several sections: an introductory section; a discussion of the methodology and preparation process; a section outlining Eritrea's policy and enabling environment vis-à-vis SDG implementation; a detailed review of progress made in achieving the SDGs; and a concluding section, which closes the report, discusses several challenges, and points the way forward. (Following the concluding section, there is also a detailed statistical annex with coverage development indicators.)

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Prior to data gathering and analysis, preliminary assessments were conducted during multi-stakeholder consultations convened by the NST and the thematic working groups. These sessions addressed the availability and quality of data, as well as identified possible sources and mechanisms for collection or estimation. Furthermore, detailed collection and reporting instruments and procedures were developed, in order to ensure consistency across the working teams and maintain a high degree of quality and rigor.

Data were collected from local (ministries and offices) and international (UNICEF, the WHO, UN-IGME, UNESCO) sources. Consistent with the guidelines detailed in the VNR preparatory handbook, Eritrea's report touches upon the status of implementation of most SDGs, but with special emphasis on SDGs 3 and 13.

Embodying the key principles of the 2030 Agenda, while also remaining uniform with the rest of the national VNR process, the development of the report was locally-owned, inclusive, highly collaborative, and transparent. Preliminary drafts were developed by the thematic working groups, overseen by the NST. The draft development process was guided by the common framework detailed in the preparatory handbook. As the substantive body of the report was progressively developed and steadily updated, working drafts were continuously shared with a diverse set of stakeholders. This provided a vital opportunity for ongoing review and enrichment through critical feedback and the incorporation of diverse perspectives, as well as helped to maintain a high degree of accuracy, refinement, and common understanding. A final working draft was disseminated during a validation workshop, where it was endorsed by various stakeholders following thorough review and open consultation.

Policy and Enabling Environment

Following the introduction and methodology sections, the report discusses Eritrea's policy and enabling environment vis-à-vis SDG implementation.

Sustainable development, in all of its forms, elements, and principles, remains an integral part of Eritrea's long-term vision and policy architecture. In fact, even prior to the international community's collective formulation and adoption of the SDGs (or preceding Millennium Development Goals) the country had fully embraced and was wholly committed to very many of the same development priorities and objectives.

Eritrea emerged out of a long, bitter struggle, not only for national independence and emancipation, but to bring about social justice, gender equality, shared prosperity and poverty elimination, and human rights. Various documents, statements, and declarations, crafted both before and after Eritrea's

independence, have articulated its bold vision to become a prosperous, developed nation where the full potential of its entire people, including women, children, and the historically marginalized, underrepresented, and vulnerable, is realized in a healthy, clean, and safe environment with peace, strong national unity and cohesion, sustained economic growth, and social justice.

At present, the vast majority of Eritrea's national policies, action plans, and cross-cutting priorities, which are collectively based upon and informed by the country's prevailing socio-political, historical, cultural, and ecological realities, are closely aligned with the SDGs and have been identified as being highly supportive of the country's development objectives. Perhaps the most pertinent is the National Charter, adopted in February 1994 in the historic city of Nakfa. The National Charter, which provides the guiding vision for the country, outlines a number of objectives and aspirations, the vast majority of which closely align and run parallel to many of the SDGs.

Significantly, Eritrea has also signed onto an array of important regional and global agreements, conventions, protocols, and frameworks that help to advance its development objectives and reinforce implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Additionally, it has undertaken tangible steps to foster a conducive environment for sustainable development that promotes inclusive, whole-of-society approaches, leverages the country's rich diversity and wealth of local, indigenous knowledge systems, and catalyzes collective actions and contributions from all regions, communities, and groups.

As a fundamental pillar of its development agenda, Eritrea has established cooperative framework and close partnerships with a range of international organizations and specialized agencies. Many of these relationships are robust and longstanding, dating back to the earliest years of the country's independence. Meaningful engagement and cooperation have been built upon a platform of common principles, transparency, and trust, with concerted efforts being based on complementarity and guided by locally-defined development priorities and needs.

In addition to its cooperation with various organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, Eritrea has maintained steady relations with other partners. It shares robust ties with many bilateral partners, is a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and works with different international organizations in the North-South and South-South framework.



Notably, Eritrea's large diaspora also plays a positive role in assisting development processes. As well as making substantial financial and in-kind contributions to a range of initiatives and projects, the diaspora promotes trade and investment opportunities, is active in business creation and entrepreneurship, provides diverse volunteer support, and assists in the transfer of knowledge and skills.

Guiding Principles

Eritrea's development and nation-building processes are firmly grounded on a number of principles, including social justice and self-reliance.

Regarding social justice and leaving no one behind, the country places unwavering emphasis on ensuring that all, regardless of any distinction, can freely and fully participate in, contribute to, and benefit from the achievement of development. Eritrea's laws, regulations, and policies, which are underpinned by strong and longstanding socio-cultural values, establish a platform for inclusive development, while guaranteeing and promoting an array of basic and fundamental rights. Discrimination, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on the grounds of disability, ethnicity, color, religion, socioeconomic status, language, opinion, gender, or other similar distinctions is strongly prohibited and punishable by national law.



Since independence, the country has crafted a spectrum of policies and adopted various legal instruments to help address the specific needs of and catalyze progress for vulnerable groups (e.g., the poor, women, children, persons with disabilities, nomadic populations, and those residing in hard-to-reach areas). These interventions play a critical role in cultivating peace and unity within Eritrea's multiethnic, multicultural society, aim to mitigate disparities and create a level playing field on which all Eritreans have an opportunity to excel, and seek to ensure that every individual is empowered and able to enjoy the fruits of development.

Eritrea's development approach is also guided by self-reliance. Perhaps somewhat unique or less common, this approach is often maligned and misjudged, with the country frequently (and incorrectly) being labeled as "isolationist". In its interactions with other governments, international development organizations, global financial institutions, and other potential donors, the Eritrean government has historically insisted on establishing genuine partnerships and cooperation, while retaining firm control of its development agenda and local implementation. As well, foreign aid is turned down when it does not fit the country's needs or its capacity to use effectively. Thus, Eritrea does not reject external support – it actively welcomes it, but only when it fills a locally-identified gap and complements the country's own internal efforts. In fact, the Eritrean government has encouraged assistance that addresses specific needs which cannot be met internally, which is designed to minimize continued external support, and which complements and strengthens, instead of replacing, Eritrea's own institutional capacity to implement projects.

Rather than isolationism, this approach is rooted in a desire to avoid crippling dependence, ensure local agency, and foster a strong, clear sense of responsibility for and genuine ownership of the country's future among all citizens.

Part III



Adi - halo - Solar - Project

In September 2000, world leaders came together at the UN to adopt the Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a global partnership on development and setting out a series of time-bound targets – with a deadline of 2015 – that would become known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were succeeded by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a collection of 17 comprehensive, closely interconnected goals, further broken down into 169 targets, designed to be a, “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.”

Eritrea was one of the few countries that entered the SDGs period having achieved most of the health-related MDGs. (Many of those goals were achieved considerably earlier than the 2015 MDG target date.) Its experiences and achievements during the MDGs period have offered a variety of lessons and a foundation to drive forward with momentum.

Notwithstanding myriad challenges, including external aggression, a difficult regional geopolitical context characterized by conflict and instability, a long period under illegal, unjust sanctions, and a spate of hostile financial and economic restrictions and coercive measures, great strides have been achieved in several areas in recent years. Eritrea’s achievements, particularly within its challenging context, are impressive and offer important insights for other countries operating in resource constrained environments. Below, progress for SDGs 3 and 13 is highlighted.

Eritrea's national health policy aims to maximize the health and well-being of all citizens at all ages and seeks to ensure equity and access to essential health services, utilizing primary health care as a key strategy and consistent with universal health coverage (UHC) principles. Since 2016 a wide set of interventions have been implemented to expand access and improve care for all, and progress is being registered towards achievement of UHC. Health services are heavily subsidized, with patients required to make only nominal payments (which are wholly waived in cases of financial need). Many essential health services are provided completely free of charge, while all patients with certain chronic diseases and other disorders are provided with free care and prescribed medications.

Accessibility, the expansion of health infrastructure, and human resource development have been areas of major focus, with the country constructing and renovating many health facilities, as well as considerably increasing the number of doctors and health professionals. There are now 335 health facilities distributed across the country (comprising hospitals, health centres, health stations, and clinics) – a nearly fourfold increase from 1991, while the number of doctors has been increased from 100 in 1997 to 291 by 2021. Across the same period, the number of dentists rose from 6 to 59, nurses from 625 to 1,474, assistant nurses from 1,220 to 2,918, dental therapists from 11 to 165, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians from 97 to 486, laboratory technicians from 99 to 517, radiologists from 28 to 132, physiotherapy technicians from 6 to 140, and specialized doctors from 5 to 74.

Distribution is also being improved, with more health workers now serving in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Approximately 80 percent of the population lives within a 10 km radius of a health facility and 70 percent within a 5 km radius, representing major improvements from just a few decades ago.

Considerable progress has been made in improving reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health. The maternal mortality ratio dropped from 998 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 228 in 2015, and 184 in 2019 – an overall reduction of 82 percent. The proportion of deliveries by skilled health workers has risen to 71 percent, the percentage of pregnant women attending at

least one antenatal care visit has increased to 98 percent, and more mothers and newborns are now receiving postnatal care within two days of childbirth. Also, between 1990 and 2020, the neonatal mortality rate was reduced by 49 percent, from 35 deaths per 1,000 live births to 18, while the under-five mortality rate was reduced by 75 percent, from 153 to 39. The average annual rate of reduction for under-five mortality between 1990 and 2020 is estimated at 4.5 percent – among the fastest in the world.



At present, neonatal mortality accounts for about 43 percent of under-five deaths and 60 percent of infant deaths, suggesting that continued reductions will be largely contingent upon further improvements in neonatal mortality. Importantly, plans are in place to begin providing more holistic and comprehensive health care for children based on integrated management of neonatal and childhood illnesses in communities and facilities around the country, as well as improving the quality of care in the peripartum period by strengthening health worker skills in early essential newborn care and scaling up access to neonatal intensive care.

Through sustained implementation of high-impact interventions and a well-coordinated multi-sectoral approach, notable success has been achieved in halting the spread of HIV and sustaining a decline in prevalence and incidence. From 2005 to 2020, HIV prevalence declined from 1.1 percent to 0.6 percent, while the incidence rate declined from 0.43 per 1,000 population to 0.1. Across the same period, AIDS-related deaths fell from 1,400 to 270. Importantly, HIV

testing is nearly universal among pregnant women (around 95 percent), and the mother to child transmission rate is estimated to be 1.8 percent. Between 2003 and 2020, the percentage of pregnant women testing positive declined from 2.5 to 0.2, while positive tests dropped from 4.3 to 0.3 among those in the general population voluntarily seeking testing. These notable measures of progress position Eritrea to apply for validation and ultimately certification of elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

The country is also transitioning from pre-elimination towards elimination of malaria, and there have been major inroads against tuberculosis, hepatitis B, and neglected tropical diseases. Additionally, tremendous strides have been made with regard to national vaccination. The proportion of the target population covered by all vaccines included in the National Immunization Programme is nearly universal, with more than 95 percent of children fully immunized for their age. According to the United Nations Statistics Division, life expectancy at birth has shown improvement, rising from 49.6 years in 1990 to 65.1 in 2016 and 67.1 years in 2021.

Notable improvements are being made in expanding access to safe, clean water. Through significant investments and a range of interventions, nationwide access to clean water is approximately 85 percent, whereas it was 13 percent in 1991. Importantly, the rural-urban gap is steadily being bridged, with access to water in urban areas rising from 30 percent to 92 percent and in rural areas from 7 percent to above 70 percent.

In terms of SDG 13, Eritrea has signed and ratified a number of international climate change agreements and instruments. As well, the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, working closely with other ministries, offices, and stakeholders, has prepared and submitted a range of climate change- and biodiversity-related reporting documents to international bodies. Eritrea continues to undertake climate change mitigation and adaptation actions, focusing on the areas of energy, industry, transport, forestry, and waste.

Annual greenhouse gas emissions remain relatively low and there are only small fluctuations per year. In 2018, GHG emissions were approximately 6.396 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂ eq.), about a 20.17 percent

increase from 2000 emissions and a slight decrease of 0.37 percent from 2015 emissions. Renewable energy is being prioritized, while steps are actively being taken to improve energy efficiency and promote clean alternatives in transport, manufacturing, and household consumption. A number of projects are also in place to conserve, restore, and enhance natural areas, including regular nationwide afforestation campaigns involving the participation of communities, students, and youth groups, as well as water and soil conservation programs.

In order to achieve a climate-resilient future, Eritrea is working towards the development of renewable energy and efficiency improvement in all sectors, particularly in energy production, transmission, distribution, and consumption, as well as in transport, manufacturing, and household energy consumption. Concurrently, an array of adaptation and mitigation efforts are also underway, including the expansion of irrigation schemes, and construction of terraces, dams, and ponds. There are plans for desalination of sea water for domestic and economic sectors, while degraded land is being restored and rehabilitated. Households and communities, especially those in at-risk areas, receive support with adaptation strategies and technologies, helping to reduce vulnerability, strengthen resiliency, and secure livelihoods.

Eritrea is vulnerable to several natural hazards, including recurrent droughts, flooding and storms, high winds, locust swarms, and volcanic activity. National responses to and management involve a comprehensive approach. The Ministry of Defence, along with different levels of government and administration, and various other partners work collaboratively to mobilize resources, coordinate activities, and assist communities to both prepare and recover.

Education is locally regarded as a strong foundation for sustainable development and recognized as a critical component in building a more just, peaceful society and world. Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development and many of their core themes are mainstreamed and tightly integrated within different aspects of the national education system, including in national education policies and guidelines, teacher education, curricula, and student assessment.

Part IV

In addition to reviewing Eritrea's progress on SDGs 3 and 13, the country's inaugural VNR report highlighted progress in other areas of development.

To begin, progress has been achieved in reducing poverty, raising agricultural production and productivity, and ensuring food and nutrition security. The proportions of poor people and those suffering from food insecurity are believed to have declined substantially since independence in 1991.

A key part of the national strategy is reducing dependence on rainfed agriculture and modernizing the agricultural sector to increase productivity and adapt to climate change. Numerous dams and ponds have been constructed nationwide, aiming to raise availability of water for irrigation and household consumption. Additionally, a variety of initiatives are conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) to assist farmers in increasing productivity and output, including water harvesting, increasing arable land, introducing better seeds, applying more efficient farming techniques, containing soil erosion, applying environment- and health-friendly fertilizers and pesticides, and promoting household income supplementing packages. Notably, experts from the MoA and the College of Agriculture also conduct workshops for farmers and communities.



Over the years, several initiatives have been implemented in an effort to reduce poverty, promote agriculture, and improve livelihoods. The Minimum Integrated Household Agricultural Package, which provides rural household with considerable support, has reached thousands of households, many poor and headed by women, ultimately promoting food and nutrition security, reducing

poverty and inequality, and ensuring that more families can lead lives of dignity. The Savings and Micro-Credit Programme, which extends loans and credit through 538 village banks, has reached more than 69,000 individuals (66 percent women) and promoted greater financial inclusion, gender equality, and economic empowerment. As well, the new civil service remuneration system, introduced in 2016/17, has led to substantial wage increases for civil workers.

In terms of education, Eritrea aims to ensure equitable access and delivery of quality education at all levels for all citizens, guided by the principle of social justice. Basic education is compulsory for both girls and boys, and child marriage legislation has been enacted and is strictly enforced, thus keeping more youths in school and helping reduce historically massive gender disparities. School feeding programs and the universal free education, covering pre-primary to higher education, ensures that every child, irrespective of background, has the opportunity to enroll in education, become literate, and maximize their potential.

Significant resources continue to be invested in expanding infrastructure. The number of schools has increased significantly, rising from 526 in 1991/92 to 1,930 in 2015/16 and to 2,254 in 2020/21. This has increased capacity, reduced overcrowding, and raised enrolments. Enrolment at all levels was 346,266 in 1997/98 and has increased to 583,269 and 619,180 in 2015/16 and 2020/21, respectively. Importantly, female enrolment continues to steadily grow and the historically huge gender gap is being narrowed. Parity between boys and girls in primary education has been achieved, while gender disparities at higher levels continue to be reduced. Overall enrolments in technical and vocational education and training are also steadily increasing (with female enrolments nearing parity), providing youths with another avenue towards employment and sustainable livelihoods.

Like enrolments, literacy has improved. In 1990, the adult literacy rate was 46 percent (males at 59 percent and females at 35 percent). By 2018, adult literacy had improved to about 77 percent (males at 84 percent and females at 69 percent). During the same period, even steeper increases were achieved in youth literacy, indicating that efforts to strengthen the supply and quality of basic education programs have largely been successful. In 1990, youth literacy was about 61 percent (males at 73 percent and females at 49 percent). However, in 2018, youth literacy had climbed to 93 percent (males at 94 percent and females at 93 percent). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's Institute for Statistics, "Eritrea has achieved one of the largest increases in youth literacy anywhere in the world over the past 50 years."

Among the highest of Eritrea's priorities is advancing gender equality, the empowering of women and girls, and the promoting and protection of their rights. Eritrea has signed and ratified human and gender rights instruments, as

well as participated at international conferences. The country has established relevant institutional and policy frameworks, as well as detailed gender action plans, for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, with a particular focus on reaching the most vulnerable, in line with international and regional gender equality standards and obligations.

Recognizing the differing life conditions and experiences of women and girls, and seeking to redress past inequities and historical disadvantages or discrimination, progressive and affirmative action measures have been enacted, most notably within the spheres of education, employment, and public life. National proclamations on labour, citizenship, and land reform have been passed and are strictly enforced to guarantee women equal access to citizenship and allow them the opportunity to access and utilize land without discrimination. Moreover, national laws and firm enforcement measures help protect women from violence and also prohibit harmful, traditional practices.

Noteworthy achievements have been recorded in the areas of women's health, education, and participation in civil, cultural, economic, political, and social life. Long-standing disparities in education continue to be narrowed, a growing percentage of women now have land and are highly active in agriculture or other activities, and women constitute about 50 percent of the country's labour force. In addition to their primary responsibility of family care, food processing and preparation, along with community activities, women contribute significantly to crop production and subsistence farming, while also being highly prominent and influential within a range of sectors.

The water sector remains critical for development, playing a significant role in economic growth, poverty alleviation, food security, and environmental sustainability. It also contributes to modernization, industries, tourism and agricultural activities. The Ministry of Land, Water, and Environment has put in place a comprehensive policy and legal framework for effective and sustainable management of the water sector. The Water Policy promotes the principles of integrated water resources management as a means to ensuring sustainable management and utilization of water resources, as well as promoting the full participation of women in all water management and development activities.

Through investments in infrastructure and conveyance systems, appropriate policies and regulations, and other efforts, access to safe, clean water has increased. The proportion of rural population with access to safe drinking water has risen from almost none (7 percent) in 1991 to 70 percent in 2021, while in urban areas access stands at 92 percent, up from 30 percent.

Regarding energy, Eritrea aims to develop the sector and ensure affordable, reliable access to electricity for all. Targets include electrifying 50 villages per

year. In 2020, the percent of the population with access to electricity was about 52 percent, up from approximately 40 percent in 2010 and about 46 percent in 2015. Access in urban areas in 2020 was 76 percent, while in rural areas it was 39 percent. The completion of over 5,000 water catchments and dams, including the Hirgigo electricity project, has more than doubled the power generating capacity from 52 to 136 megawatts.

Although there is considerable still room for further expansion, Eritrea's national road network has grown, expanding from approximately 4,930 km in 1991 to more than 15,100 km at present. Over 85 percent of cities and villages in the country are now connected by roads. Likewise, the availability of public transportation in the country has been improved. The number of buses in rural areas has increased from about 267 in 1991 to more than 2,000, while 85 percent of all cities and villages have access to public transportation.



Eritrea's abundance of minerals, natural resources, and biodiversity, as well as its long, pristine shoreline on the Red Sea offer immense opportunities for economic growth. The presence of natural and biological resources, and their diversity, provide raw materials and inputs for domestic and commercial production along with consumption, as well as providing a range of ecosystem services which support human populations and their economic activities. In recent years, mining has emerged as an increasingly significant sector and now accounts for a large percentage of exports and FDI. Notably, the government has established favorable terms and a highly sophisticated regulatory framework, broadly consistent with global best practices. There is significant and growing foreign interest and investment, with engagement by multinational companies from around the world. Given the country's large natural resource endowment,

strong vigilance against corruption, generally attractive regulatory regime, and overall upside, there is substantial potential for further growth and expansion.

Rich biodiversity also allows for the possibility of future economic growth and holds intrinsic cultural, bequest and heritage values for the country. Importantly, Eritrea has taken concrete steps to protect its unique cultural and natural heritage. Two cornerstones for the country were the “Cultural and Natural Heritage Proclamation”, which, since 2015, lists immovable assets eligible for having national significance and the inclusion, in 2017, of Asmara in the UNESCO World Heritage List. To protect and sustainably manage both terrestrial and marine ecosystems in the country, extensive natural resources conservation measures have been undertaken by the government and development partners.

Part V

Eritrea's inaugural Voluntary National Review (VNR) report finishes with a concluding section. The section summarizes the entire report, discusses several challenges, and points the way forward. (Following the concluding section, there is also a detailed statistical annex with coverage development indicators.)



Overall, Eritrea has achieved significant and notable progress in a number of different areas. Furthermore, taking into account the high-level commitment of the government, strong technical leadership, policy and strategic guidance, robust local governing structure which reaches to the grassroots level, dedicated workforce, improved economic and social infrastructure, and high willingness and active participation of communities in development projects and other activities, there is much room for additional progress and more improvement moving forward.

At the same time, however, the government readily recognizes and acknowledges that considerable challenges remain in many areas. Eritrea must continue to work, expend resources, foster cooperation, and cultivate partnerships to fully realize its developmental aspirations and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Although child and maternal mortality have been drastically reduced in Eritrea, with the country encouragingly remaining on track to achieve the associated

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets, overall levels of child and maternal mortality are still unacceptably high. Locally, the death of even one child or mother is regarded as too many and considerable efforts are being made to ensure further reductions in morbidity and mortality. As well, there must be continuous focus on communicable diseases and reproductive, maternal, and child health issues, including nutritional deficiencies, diarrheal diseases, and acute respiratory infections. Additionally, the recent shift in the national disease burden from communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases, which is closely associated with a variety of different factors, such as urbanization and changing diets, lifestyles, and behaviors, calls for renewed efforts and further work to reduce major modifiable risk factors, develop and implement effective legal frameworks, and orient the health system through people-centered health care.



Over the years, external aggression, conflict, and illegal sanctions have posed a considerable obstacle to Eritrea's general development aspirations and the country's achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Long running conflict and external aggression have led to severe destruction and a range of profound consequences, required the diversion of critical human and fiscal resources to national defense and security, and greatly delayed peace and the normalization of relationships among countries of the region.

Furthermore, Eritrea has been saddled with illegal, unjust sanctions, as well as a spate of additional hostile restrictions and coercive measures. Around the world, it has increasingly been recognized that unilateral sanctions are illegal, immoral, and counterproductive to their stated aims. Many studies and reports demonstrate that they hurt the general population and are particularly harmful to the human rights of women, children, and other vulnerable groups within the countries targeted by the sanctions. In Eritrea, illegal, unjust sanctions collectively have: severely inhibited trade, credit and loans, and investment; considerably complicated or even prevented attempts to obtain critical materials and much-needed resources, thus hampering reconstruction and efforts to promote sustainable development; caused substantial economic, commercial, and financial damages; and resulted in innumerable lost or forfeited opportunities.

Partnerships and cooperation offer great potential for further development gains. In particular, Eritrea's achievement of its general development aspirations and the SDGs can be realized through effective local and global partnerships, strong cooperation, and efficient coordination between the government and different stakeholders across a broad range of areas. The country has forged strategic partnerships that create value for all actors and that leverage and reinforce the interconnectedness of all societal actors. In this context, revitalising and further expanding technical, financial, and other cooperation with bilateral and multilateral partners will help to accelerate progress, drive positive momentum, and scale up successful interventions. In addition, it will play a positive pivotal role in supporting a sustainable, resilient, and equitable COVID-19 recovery, as the country seeks to build forward stronger and to secure a better future for its people, as well as advance the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Since the beginning of the SDGs nearly a decade ago, challenges related to data have been a constant, recurring theme within the VNR reports presented by numerous countries (especially those within the developing world). In general, data gaps threaten to hinder the achievement of the SDGs. For many countries, the main challenge in the production of quality, timely data, is a lack of funding and technical capacity.

In Eritrea, too, there is a great need to strengthen the national statistical system and build capacity with regard to domestic data generation, processing and analysis, and dissemination through enhancing collaboration and coordination between data producers in the country. The production of timely, robust, and disaggregated data remains an important national aim. Significantly, it will help to promote transparency and significantly enhance the monitoring infrastructure for tracking progress in various core developmental areas, including but not limited to, education, the economy and employment, housing, health services, energy. Additionally, the establishment of a strong and efficient national statistical system, as well as provision of adequate and high-quality data will play an important role in guiding and supporting evidence-based planning, decision-making, policy formulation, and resource allocation toward achievement of Eritrea's broad development aspirations and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Another pressing issue raised in the VNR relates to the environment and climate change-induced challenges. Historically, the vast majority of global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) have come from wealthy, developed countries. Yet, the far-reaching impacts of climate change have been most acutely felt by low-income countries, especially those in Africa. (Although estimates slightly vary, African nations are responsible for around 4 percent of global GHG.) Climate change is increasingly devastating parts of the continent, contributing to food insecurity, land degradation, land or resource conflicts, population displacement and migration, and stress on water resources, among other impacts.

Eritrea is especially vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, despite the fact that the country continues to be responsible for only a negligible amount of total global GHG emissions. Moving forward, significant technical and financial cooperation will be required to strengthen capacity to address climate change, introduce clean technologies, pursue research and innovation, and promote a just energy transition. With Eritrea blessed with an abundance of natural resources, appropriate and sustainable management must also continue to be a guiding principle and priority. Additionally, public awareness and sensitization to mitigate unsustainable exploitation of natural resources must be expanded.

Overall, Eritrea's participation at the High-Level Political Forum and the general VNR process has been a productive exercise and worthwhile endeavour. Not only has it offered an important, insightful overview of general developmental progress to date, it has also established a strong foundation for further improvement and gains in the years ahead.